

THE MASQUERADE

screenplay by

Greg Derochie

Based on the novella "The Masque" by

Andrew J. Clark

INT. GLASS ELEVATOR - NIGHT

A couple (30s) locked in a passionate kiss. We will come to know them as MISTER FOX and MISS DOE. Outside, we glimpse a city battered by a storm before the elevator descends below ground.

The couple trade smiles of solidarity, hold hands and clasp pinkie fingers.

INT. SUB-BASEMENT - NIGHT

Fox and Doe approach a DESK CLERK flanked by security guards. They place cards on the desk. The clerk scans them and consults his screen.

DESK CLERK

Married? Don't see many of those. Room four.

They collect their cards and continue down the corridor.

INT. BRIGHT LAB - NIGHT

Fox and Doe hand their cards to a LAB TECH, his face hidden behind a surgical mask. He motions to a row of inclined medical beds and they both lay down.

The tech scans their cards and retinas.

LAB TECH

ID confirmed. G-217 and M-95.

Fox reaches out to Doe, their hands almost touch.

KA-POW! An injector shoots liquid into Doe's neck.

FOX

Can you give us a little more time?

LAB TECH

Gotta keep the line moving. Good luck.

KA-POW! He's injected.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

Eyes blink open.

Fox takes a deep breath and sits up. Finds himself on a four-poster bed surrounded by shimmering curtains. SOOTHING MUSIC sets him at ease.

He pulls the curtain aside to see...

AN ELEGANT HOTEL ROOM

Warm and inviting with timeless decor but no windows.

Fox climbs off the bed and notices his satin pajamas.

In the closet, he finds a single outfit hanging on the rack - A TUXEDO.

In the bathroom, Fox steps before the mirror and admires how good he looks in the tux. He picks up a water glass, strikes a James Bond pose, and toasts himself.

Back in the main room, Fox is drawn to a GLITTERING CARD on a mahogany desk. He reads it aloud.

FOX

Mister Fox, you are cordially invited
to the festivities. Kindly don your
mask and join us in the grand hall.

He picks up the mask. It's small, silvery and translucent with no string or elastic band. He lifts it to his face. It sticks the moment it touches his skin.

HALLWAY

Fox steps into a corridor lined with rows of identical doors. He glances back at his door and notes the room number - G 217.

He looks up and down the hallway. Both directions lead to groups of elevators.

ELEVATOR FOYER

Fox approaches the elevators and a door opens to invite him in.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Fox finds a panel with buttons labeled "A" through "Z" and "Hall." He presses "Hall." The doors close and he feels the elevator descend. Turns to his reflection on the wall and nods.

FOX

Fox... Mister Fox. Mister Fox?

He leans closer and looks at his reflection. He runs his finger along the edge of the mask. He tries to pull it away, but it resists, like it's superglued on.

The muffled sound of BIG BAND MUSIC lifts his spirits.

A LARGE FOYER

Fox steps out of the elevator and smiles at the sound of a party in full swing.

He follows a curved passage leading to...

THE BALLROOM

Fox finds himself on the balcony level of a magnificent two-level space. He approaches a marble railing edge and looks down to the central hall.

SERVANTS in white tuxedos carry drinks through a lively crowd of formally dressed guests. Some dance to the band playing Gershwin's "Stairway to Paradise."

Everyone wears the same silver mask.

PELICAN (O.S.)

Have you just arrived?

Fox turns to a professorial gentleman at his elbow sipping pink champagne. This is MISTER PELICAN.

FOX

I must have overslept.

PELICAN

No matter. First things first.

Pelican snatches a champagne glass from a passing servant and offers it to Fox.

PELICAN

To your good health, and welcome to the party.

Fox drinks and his eyes light up.

PELICAN

Splendid, isn't it? Wait until you try the food. It's out of this world. Oh, excuse me, I'm Mister Pelican.

FOX

Fox, according to my invitation.

PELICAN

It's a pleasure to meet you, Mister Fox. A pleasure.

FOX

So what do you make of these names? Fox, Pelican? A bit mysterious, isn't it?

PELICAN

Of course it is. Everyone loves a good mystery.

FOX

I prefer a good answer.

PELICAN

Answers are boring, Mister Fox. Boring! Look at that gentleman down there, holding court with the ladies. He knows how to have a good time.

Fox looks below where a well-fed man sits on a plush sofa surrounded by a gaggle of attentive women.

FOX

You think he might be our host?

PELICAN

Mister Boar? The host? Nonsense. The man does think highly of himself though. I'd steer clear if I were you.

FOX

So you haven't met the host?

PELICAN

No, not yet. All in good time, I'm sure.

Fox scrutinizes Pelican.

FOX

Are you the host?

PELICAN

Mister Fox, you strike me as an intelligent man, but a man who has trouble relaxing.

FOX

Maybe I am.

PELICAN

Look at this place! It's a party! Parties are for fun, are they not? I say enjoy what is offered and leave the rest to fate.

Fox raises his glass and lets his gaze drift over the crowd below. He notices a table at the edge of the room with a huge abstract ice sculpture surrounded by chilled appetizers.

PELICAN

Now, you must allow me to show you the games room. I've been gathering players and I think you'll be a wonderful addition to the table.

FOX

Sounds fun, but I'm suddenly starving. Would you excuse me?

PELICAN

Of course, Mister Fox, of course. By all means, indulge yourself!

Fox hands Pelican his drink and heads down the grand staircase.

Pelican pours Fox's drink into his own.

BALLROOM FLOOR

Fox makes his way through the crowd and arrives at the table filled with mouthwatering treats.

PIGEON (O.S.)
Try this. It will change your life.

Fox is fed by a tall, confident woman, MISS PIGEON.

FOX
Wow.

PIGEON
It's all you can eat, Mister...

FOX
Fox.

Fox gobbles two more.

PIGEON
Mister Fox. Oh, I like that. I got stuck with Miss Pigeon.

FOX
Do you think there's some reason for these names?

PIGEON
Who cares. Let's dance.

She drags him onto the dance floor, where Fox makes an effort to keep up with her exuberant, flirty style.

PIGEON
Have you been to the spa yet?

FOX
No, I'm not really--

PIGEON
I'll take you later. It's divine.

While Pigeon works her sultry moves, Fox is struck by a feeling. He scans the crowd. There, at the edge of the room, a strawberry blonde - Miss Doe.

Fox is mesmerized. He watches her walk the perimeter in a dazzling black dress with champagne in hand.

ACROSS THE ROOM

Doe walks past Mister Boar and his entourage. Something tugs at her dress. She turns to find Boar pinching the fabric.

DOE
Do you mind?

BOAR
(releases her)
Sit with me.

DOE
You seem to have plenty of company
already.

BOAR
The more the merrier, my dear. The
more the merrier.

Doe dumps her champagne into his lap and strides off.

Boar recovers with a quick smile.

BOAR
C'est la vie, nest pas?

The entourage laughs along with him.

BACK TO FOX

Grins at what he just witnessed.

PIGEON
Hey.

FOX
What?

She follows his gaze to Doe.

PIGEON
I know I said all you can eat, but one
at a time, Mister Fox. One at a time.

Fox continues to dance with her, but ten seconds later, he can't stand it and...

FOX
Will you excuse me?

PIGEON
Do I have a choice?

Fox slips away, mouthing "Sorry."

AT THE ICE SCULPTURE

Doe samples the appetizers. Fox approaches with champagne.

FOX
I think you've earned this.

Doe turns to face the handsome man offering her a drink.

DOE
Hello, stranger.

FOX
You misplaced the last one in
someone's lap if I'm not mistaken.

DOE
You saw that?

FOX
I've been advised to avoid that guy.

DOE
I can handle myself.

FOX
I believe you.

Doe takes a glass, clinks with Fox, and drinks.

DOE
Are you stalking me?

FOX
Admiring. Have we met before?

DOE
I don't think so.

FOX
Are you sure? You seem very familiar.

DOE
Is that your best line?

FOX
It's not a line. It's just... a
feeling.

DOE
You just arrived, didn't you?

FOX
Why do you say that?

DOE
I hate to do this to you, but you need
to catch up.

She sets her glass aside, does the same with his, then
whispers into his ear.

DOE
What's your real name?

Fox struggles with that, rising to a panic. Doe intervenes,
takes him by the arm, and leads him to the dance floor.

DOE
It's okay. Let's dance.

The band plays a slow number.

FOX
I can't remember my name.

DOE
I know.

FOX
I mean, I can't remember anything.

DOE
I know. I've tried to remember mine,
but I get nothing. Just a fog.

FOX
Shouldn't we be able to remember our
names? Or how we got here? Or when?

DOE
Shh... We shouldn't draw too much
attention to ourselves.

FOX

Why not?

DOE

Just a feeling.

Fox meets her comforting gaze. *I know her, but from where?*

DOE

Here's the deal. I woke up in my room and joined the party. I'm guessing it was the same for you. I don't remember anything else, so I figure, go along for the ride and see where this goes.

FOX

Really?

DOE

Look around you. This place is amazing. What's wrong with having your every desire fulfilled? Just let go and enjoy it.

FOX

Let go and enjoy it.

DOE

Like this.

Doe twirls herself out and back.

DOE

By the way, you can call me Miss Doe.

FOX

A pleasure, Miss Doe. I'm Mister Fox.

The name strikes her. She stops dancing.

FOX

What is it?

Doe realizes she's drawing attention and resumes dancing.

FOX

What's wrong?

DOE

Your name. It was written on the back of my invitation.

Now it's Fox who stops. Doe pulls him close and whispers.

DOE

I thought it was some clue to a party game. Keep dancing.

FOX

Maybe our Host likes to play games.

DOE

As far as I can tell nobody's met the Host yet.

FOX

Nobody?

DOE

Enough questions. Let's just dance.

Fox complies. He enjoys being close to her, the smell of her hair, until the song ends and everyone applauds.

FOX

I'd love to see your room.

DOE

You need to work on your pickup lines.

FOX

I want to see that invitation.

She looks at him and wonders, *can I trust him?*

IN THE ELEVATOR

Fox and Doe enter. She punches the button for level M.

They ride in silence for a beat, until...

FOX

Wow, déjà vu.

DOE

What?

FOX

This.

DOE

Riding an elevator?

FOX
You don't feel it?

DOE
Just so we're clear, I'm taking you to
my room to show you my invitation.
That's it. I've had enough male
attention for one night.

FOX
Understood.

HALLWAY - LEVEL M

Doe leads Fox down the hall to door M-95 and lets herself in.

INSIDE DOE'S ROOM

Fox finds the room to be exactly like his.

Doe grabs her invitation off the desk, flips it over, and
finds...

DOE
It's gone.

Fox takes a look. Nothing on the back.

DOE
I swear it was here. The word "Fox",
handwritten, right there.

FOX
Are you sure we haven't met before?

Doe considers the question, then puts the invitation back.

DOE
Let's go back to the ballroom.

She heads for the door.

Fox holds back and scans the room.

FOX
Where are the windows?

DOE

What?

Fox moves to the drapery behind the desk, pulls it aside to see the wall.

They look at each other, thinking the same thing.

FOX

Have you seen a single window in this place?

Doe considers that strange fact.

DOE

I think we should--

A MUFFLED SCREAM cuts the air.

FOX

What the hell was that?

IN THE HALLWAY

Fox and Doe rush back to the hall and hear another PAINED GROAN.

FOX

Over there...

Fox moves to investigate but Doe clamps onto him.

DOE

Don't. Let someone else take care of it.

FOX

We can't just--

DOE

It's better to not get involved.

Fox gently removes her hand.

FOX

I'll be right back.

He runs down the hall.

Doe returns to the elevators and slaps the call button. She turns to watch Fox disappear around a corner.

The elevator arrives, but she hesitates to get in.

A DARK HALLWAY

Fox enters to find some of the wall lights broken. He approaches a dark area and sees something puzzling.

A man in a white tuxedo, a SERVANT, appears to be hovering just above the floor with his back to the wall. Fox creeps closer and realizes...

The man is pinned to the wall.

Fox rushes to his aide. The servant looks at Fox with an odd, blank expression. A metal object pierces his chest.

Fox yanks it out and the man drops to the floor.

He glances at the shard of metal in his hand, tosses it aside, and kneels next to the servant. Checks for a pulse... Dead.

Fox surveys the area, noticing the blood-stained wall and damage to a painting.

He looks at the weapon on the carpet. Bloody footprints lead off down the hall.

Fox follows the trail. It leads to a guest room, its door cracked open.

Fox touches the door and...

A SHAPE EXPLODES OUT

Slams Fox to the floor.

Face down, he can't see the attacker, but the voice in his ear is a BEASTLY GROWL.

BEAST

Snap out of it! Get in the fight,
before it's too late!

An elbow to his back knocks the wind out of Fox. By the time he gets up, the attacker is gone.

His bloody footprints remain.

ELEVATOR LOBBY

Fox follows the footprints back to the elevators where the trail vanishes.

The elevator chimes and several GUESTS emerge.

Fox hides his hands until they pass.

BACK IN THE MURDER HALLWAY

Fox is shocked to find the servant is gone.

The lights are fixed. The painting is undamaged. It's like nothing happened.

Except for the blood on his hands.

IN A RESTROOM

Fox washes his hands at one of the marble sinks, checks his clothes, and finds them clean.

The restroom door opens.

DOE (O.S.)
Fox? Are you alone?

FOX
Yes.

Doe joins him at the sink while he dries his hands.

DOE
Well?

FOX
I thought you didn't want to get involved.

DOE
I don't. I just want to bring you back.

FOX

Back to the party? Return to the festivities and don't question anything?

DOE

Back to where we left off. On the dance floor. That doesn't sound so bad, does it?

She comforts him with a smile but he's not having it.

FOX

Someone's been murdered.

DOE

What? Where?

FOX

It doesn't matter. It's gone now. The body's been whisked away. But I have the man's blood on my--

Fox realizes his hands are clean. He has no evidence.

FOX

I know what I saw.

DOE

Are you? Everything here is for our enjoyment.

FOX

You really believe that?

DOE

Yes. It's probably just one of those dinner party murder mysteries. You don't have to play along if you don't want to.

FOX

Don't you understand? We're not safe here.

Fox is fired up and grabs her by the shoulders.

DOE

You're hurting me.

He lets go immediately.

FOX
I'm sorry. I'm--

Two large men in white tuxedos enter the restroom. They are WOLF and HAWK. They look like bouncers, despite their formal wear.

WOLF
Good evening.

FOX
Good evening.

WOLF
Do you need assistance?

DOE
No. We're fine. We were just about to go back downstairs.

FOX
Right. Back to the party.

Fox and Doe head for the door, but Wolf clamps onto Fox and holds him back.

WOLF
Mister Hawk will be happy to escort you, Miss.

DOE
Is there a problem?

WOLF
I need a word with Mister Fox.

FOX
(to Doe)
Go ahead. I'll catch up with you.

Hawk urges Doe toward the door.

FOX
Miss Doe... Save me that dance?

Doe smiles, then she's gone.

Fox is alone with Wolf.

FOX
So, you guys are security?

WOLF

The Host would like to see you.

FOX

The Host? Good. I'd love to have a word with him.

Fox moves for the door, but Wolf blocks the way.

WOLF

Just a moment, please.

FOX

Am I in trouble?

Wolf is stoned face.

FOX

If you've got a killer on the loose, shouldn't you be warning the guests?

No reaction from Wolf.

FOX

What are we waiting for?

Wolf touches his ear - a silent communication from someone, then...

WOLF

This way.

Wolf heads for the door. Fox straightens his tux and follows.

HALLWAY - BALLROOM LEVEL

Wolf marches Fox through a series of hallways before stopping near a large painting, a depiction of paradise.

After ensuring they are alone, Wolf touches the ornate frame and the painting retracts into the wall. Fox is pulled through the opening and into...

A SECRET GALLERY

Fox notices rows of paintings depicting lush natural environments as he's pulled along. He looks back to see the secret entrance close behind them.

At the far end of the gallery, they approach massive doors engraved with strange patterns. The doors open to reveal...

THE HOST CHAMBER

An expansive private sanctuary surrounded by dramatic nude sculptures. The guards wait by the doors.

Fox advances to a polished stone desk with a high-backed chair facing an arched window. Beyond the window is an eerie misty darkness.

A DEEP VOICE resonates from somewhere in the room.

HOST (O.S.)

Welcome, Mister Fox. Are you enjoying the festivities?

FOX

A man's just been murdered. I'd like to know--

HOST (O.S.)

Knowing is not always necessary, Mister Fox.

FOX

Is it a crime to be curious?

HOST (O.S.)

Questions... Always questions. Why concern yourself with such matters? Why not dance?

Fox approaches the high-backed chair. Finds it empty.

FOX

Where are you?

HOST (O.S.)

I find the guest experience more enjoyable without my direct presence.

FOX

Are you the Host?

HOST (O.S.)

Every party must have a host. That is my role.

FOX

What's mine?

HOST (O.S.)

I invited you here to answer your question.

FOX

About the murder?

HOST (O.S.)

No. The one that truly haunts you. The one preventing you from fully embracing the festivities.

Fox takes a moment, then it comes to him...

FOX

Who is Miss Doe? Who am I to her?

HOST (O.S.)

Yes... I will answer your question, but first, you must do something for me. Find the uninvited. Find him and eliminate him.

FOX

The uninvited?

HOST (O.S.)

The killer. The one with the mark of the Beast. He must be stopped before more are lost. He is a growing threat to everything in my charge.

FOX

Why me? You've got your security people.

HOST (O.S.)

My servants have limits. Limits that you may be able to surpass.

FOX

I don't understand.

HOST (O.S.)

I cannot destroy that which I am sworn to protect. You are not bound by such restrictions, Mister Fox. You can do what I cannot.

FOX
I'm not a killer.

HOST (O.S.)
Are you certain of that?

FOOTSTEPS ECHO. Fox turns to face the arched window, strains his eyes against the darkness, and sees a shape emerge...

A priestly figure in flowing robes covered with cryptic symbols, his face hidden beneath a hood.

THE HOST has revealed himself.

HOST
The choice is yours, but know this...
I am offering you an opportunity to
perform a great service to your fellow
man, to do something truly meaningful.

Fox inches closer, but the Host's face remains hidden in shadow.

FOX
Who are you?

HOST
Your connection to Miss Doe is
powerful. I assume you would do
nothing to jeopardize that.

FOX
Is that some kind of threat?

HOST
Time is short, Mister Fox. Will you
accept the challenge?

FOX
If I do what you ask...

HOST
All of your questions will be
answered. This is my pledge to you.

Wolf is suddenly at Fox's side, pulling him back to the door.

FOX
Wait, where do I start? How do I find
him?

HOST

You will find a way. Act quickly and do not speak with him. That will only risk further infection.

FOX

Infection? What kind of infection?

HOST

We will speak again when it is done.

HOST

I haven't agreed to anything yet. Hey!

The doors shut.

The Host is alone. He sits at his desk and contemplates the black void outside the arched window.

IN THE SECRET GALLERY

Wolf leads Fox back to the exit.

FOX

How many people has this guy killed?
What does he want?

Wolf remains stone-faced.

FOX

Come on man, we're on the same team,
aren't we?

The paradise painting slides open and Fox is shoved through.

HALLWAY - BALLROOM LEVEL

Fox is shoved into the hallway and the secret painting snaps closed behind him.

He examines the frame but finds no way to open it. A TIPSY GUEST strolls by and Fox pretends to admire the painting.

Fox sinks into a lounge chair and rubs his temples. He gets a whiff of something on his hand... *Doe's perfume*. The fragrance triggers...

FLASHBACK - THE BRIGHT LAB

Fox and Doe lock eyes. Hands reach out, almost touch.

BACK TO PRESENT

Fox gets to his feet, energized, and sets off toward the ballroom.

BALLROOM BALCONY

The party continues.

Fox scans the crowd below. Everyone is having a grand time. He lets the festive atmosphere wash over him, willing the memory of the attack to fade away.

A servant approaches with champagne. Fox grabs one and downs it. Feels better. The servant takes his empty glass.

FOX

Where would I find the games room?

SERVANT

This way, sir.

Fox follows him along the balcony and through an arched passage.

IN THE GAMES ROOM

A bustle of activity; billiards, chess, board games, and card tables.

Pelican runs a card game at one of the tables. The players include MISTER QUAIL, wiry and focused, and MISTER CARP, confused by his cards. Mister Boar is the fourth.

PELICAN

I believe it's to you, Mister Quail.

QUAIL

Pass.

BOAR

Pass? Ya don't get to pass.

PELICAN

Mister Quail is quite within his rights to pass.

(MORE)

PELICAN (cont'd)

Remember, you're trying to deduce the rule master's pattern, that's me in this case, by repeatedly testing the strength of your--

BOAR

Forget this nonsense. I'm out.

CARP

Me too.

PELICAN

Gentlemen, please. I'd be happy to explain the rules again.

BOAR

Forget it. This was supposed to be fun, and it ain't.

Boar pushes back from his chair and heads for the bar.

Quail downs his drink and follows like a loyal puppy. Mister Carp folds and leaves next. Pelican gathers the cards, exasperated.

Fox drops into the seat across from him.

PELICAN

Mister Fox! I'm delighted to see you again. Have you come for a game?

FOX

Pelican. Have you seen anything odd since you've been here? I mean, anything that would make you... I don't know... Concerned for your safety.

PELICAN

This place is a delight. Why on Earth would you possibly think otherwise?

FOX

Never mind. I'm looking for Miss Doe.

PELICAN

Miss Doe...

FOX

Strawberry Blonde, gorgeous eyes?

PELICAN

Well... Is that the young lady over there?

Fox looks to the bar across the room where Doe is nursing a drink.

PELICAN

She's welcome to join. I could use some more players.

Fox is already gone.

Pelican flags down a waiter with champagne.

AT THE BAR

Fox slides in next to Doe.

FOX

Hello, stranger.

DOE

Hey. There you are. I was beginning to wonder--

FOX

I'd like to apologize again. I didn't mean to hurt you.

DOE

Apology accepted.

FOX

Good. I wanted to make sure you were okay.

DOE

Got myself a drink. I'm good.

WAITER

What can I get for you, sir?

Fox waves him off. Keeps his eyes on Doe.

FOX

Can ask you something?

DOE

Fire away.

FOX

Do you remember a bright white room? I think you and I were both there, before all this.

DOE

A bright room. A bright room... What were we doing there?

FOX

I don't remember. It's just...

DOE

A feeling?

FOX

Exactly.

DOE

Are you gonna tell me what happened back there?

Fox huddles closer. *Her perfume...*

FOX

(whispers)

I was taken to see the Host.

Doe studies his face. Believes him.

DOE

And?

FOX

And... he wants me to do something for him.

DOE

What?

Fox wants to tell her. He wants to share everything with her, but...

FOX

It's better if you don't know.

DOE

Better for who?

She finishes her drink and signals for another.

FOX
 There's something rotten in paradise,
 and I have to find it.

DOE
 Why you? Let someone else--

FOX
 I can't. There's too much at stake.

DOE
 Such as?

FOX
 I'm going to find the truth, and when
 I do, I'll tell you everything. I
 promise.

She toasts him with a full glass.

FOX
 It's a date.

Fox suddenly feels the weight of a stare. Sure enough, a
 nearby servant watches them suspiciously.

FOX
 I should go.

DOE
 You should go.

He's about to leave, but she pulls him into a kiss, the kind
 that draws attention. When it's over...

DOE
 Hmm. That does seem familiar.

A SUSPICIOUS SERVANT approaches. Fox slips away.

SUSPICIOUS SERVANT
 Was that gentleman bothering you,
 Miss?

DOE
 Yes, he was. But in the best way.

She waves the man off and returns to her drink.

HALLWAY - LEVEL C

Fox approaches the painting where the servant was killed. Runs his fingers along the frame. Pulls it off the wall. Just a regular painting.

He approaches the door... the one his attacker burst out of. He knocks and reaches for the handle, but it snaps open.

A muscular guest with no jacket or shoes glares at Fox suspiciously. This is MISTER SWAN.

Fox composes himself. *Is he facing the killer?*

SWAN

Yes?

FOX

Um, security check. We had a report of some trouble here earlier. One of the servants was attacked right outside your room.

SWAN

I didn't hear anything. Must have dozed off.

FOX

Too much champagne?

SWAN

Too much everything.

FOX

I'd like to check your room if you don't mind.

Swan steps aside and lets him in.

SWAN'S ROOM

Fox scans the room while Swan watches with growing suspicion.

FOX

Do you have an invitation?

SWAN

In the closet. Jacket pocket.

Fox can feel Swan staring as he digs the invitation out of the hanging jacket and sees the name "SWAN."

An unsettling HUM grabs his attention. He pushes the jacket aside and puts his ear to the back wall.

FOX
Mister Swan?

SWAN (O.S.)
What?

FOX
Can I see your shoes, please?

SWAN (O.S.)
My shoes?

Fox extracts himself from the closet.

FOX
If you don't mind.

Swan offers the shoes with growing impatience. Fox inspects the soles. No sign of blood.

SWAN
Why are you pretending to be security?
I know there are all kinds of games
here, but I don't get this one.

Fox knows he's caught.

FOX
Look I have to find this guy. It's
important. For all of us.

SWAN
Not to me.

IN THE HALL

Fox is shoved out of Swan's room. Door slams.

The sound of LAUGHTER. He realizes it comes from down the hall.

ELEVATOR LOBBY

Fox finds the same lobby where the bloody footprints disappeared before. He watches a group of AMUSED GUESTS waiting for an elevator.

AMUSED GUEST

Join us, friend. Rumor is that dinner
is served!

Fox waves him off, sits in a club chair, and watches them leave.

With the lobby to himself, Fox studies the space. *The blood trail ended here. How did he escape?*

He closes his eyes and listens to muted sounds of the hotel. Then he hears it, very faint.

THE HUM

He gets up and cups an ear to the wall behind him. He follows the hum until he reaches a series of decorative wall panels. The HUM seems louder.

He grips the panel edges... Pulls, and it pops off to reveal...

A RAGGED HOLE IN THE WALL

Fox pokes his head inside and discovers a passage receding into darkness.

He glances back to the lobby to make sure no one is watching, then steps into the narrow passage and pulls the wall panel back into place behind him.

IN THE SPA

Pigeon soaks in a bubbling hot tub, eyes closed. She has the room to herself until Doe enters.

DOE

How is it?

PIGEON

Divine.

Doe sits on the edge of the pool and dips her feet into the water.

DOE

Didn't I see you dancing with Mister
Fox?

Pigeon opens her eyes and recognizes Doe from earlier.

PIGEON

Yes, I was. Until he laid eyes on you.

DOE

I think he might be in some trouble.

PIGEON

Really? Didn't peg him as a bad boy.

DOE

I'm worried, and I thought you might
know something about him that could
help.

PIGEON

He's cute. But you already know that.

Doe gets up to leave.

PIGEON

If you're interested in pursuing him
you don't need my permission.

DOE

I wasn't asking for permission.

PIGEON

You should join me. This really is
heavenly.

Doe is already out the door.

INSIDE A CONNECTING PASSAGE

Fox takes a moment to adjust to the darkness and notices the
ancient stones that form the passage.

He shuffles deeper, guided by a faint blue light ahead. The
passage abruptly turns and widens.

A BLAST OF AIR knocks him off balance. He clings to the rocks
until the wind suddenly dies off.

He sees an opening ahead, pushes forward until he emerges from the passage and finds himself inside...

THE BACKSTAGE MAZE

A multi-level maze of industrial framework. A cavernous space with catwalks, pipes, and steam vents, stretching over countless levels.

Fox is blown away. *What the hell is this?*

He glances back at the stone passage and finds it to be a rough opening in a massive vertical wall.

He turns his attention to the blue light bleeding through the industrial maze. He ventures away from the wall, following winding catwalks until coming to a guardrail.

Beyond the guardrail, his jaw drops at the sight of...

A SEA OF ENERGY

Extending far off into a haze. *How can any of this be here?*

A CLANG RINGS OUT

Stops him cold. From somewhere above. Fox scurries down a stairwell and SOMETHING SNAPS. The stairwell tilts and throws him off balance.

He tumbles over the edge.

He flails... Grabs hold of a pipe and dangles over the abyss.

He reaches up with his free hand but can't latch on.

Fingers are slipping...

A SHADOW LOOMS OVER HIM

Fox looks up to the face of a monster...

THE FACE OF THE BEAST.

It takes a moment to realize he's looking at a man (50s) in a terrifying mask - a furrowed brow over narrow slits of malicious eyes.

This is MISTER SPARROW.

He grabs Fox and pulls him onto the catwalk.

Sparrow crouches while Fox catches his breath.

SPARROW
What are you doing here?

Fox looks at his rescuer and notices he wears a tattered tuxedo.

SPARROW
I asked you a question.

Fox sits up and checks his surroundings, but his escape route is blocked. He recalls the Host's warning... *Do not speak with him...*

FOX
I got lost.

SPARROW
Lost.

FOX
That's right. I was--

SPARROW
No one finds this place by accident.

Fox squirms. Looks down at the energy inferno.

FOX
What's down there?

SPARROW
I'll ask the questions. What's your name?

FOX
Fox.

SPARROW
Did he send you to kill me?

Fox sees no way out of this conversation, so...

FOX
Why did you kill that servant?

Sparrow feigns a threatening move.

SPARROW

Because I'm a beast! Isn't that obvious?

His anger subsides. He waves a hand over his mask with a flourish.

SPARROW

Courtesy of the Host. Punishment for seeking the truth.

Fox sees an opening...

FOX

You're a guest?

SPARROW

Once upon a time. Now I'm the ghost in the machine. The Phantom of the Opera.

FOX

I seek the truth too. Maybe we can help each other.

Sparrow brandishes a weapon, a steel shard.

SPARROW

I doubt that very much. On your feet.

FOX

You don't need that.

Fox stands, adrenaline pumping.

SPARROW

We're too close to that hellfire. Time to move.

Sparrow steps aside to let Fox pass. Fox doesn't want to get stabbed in the heart, so he does what he's told.

ON ANOTHER LEVEL

Sparrow marches Fox through the maze.

FOX

Can I ask you something?

SPARROW

*If you must, but I am not bound to
please thee with my answer.*

Fox doesn't understand the reference.

SPARROW

Shakespeare. One of the few things
stuck in the gray matter.

FOX

What was that I almost fell into?

SPARROW

I call it the inferno. Probably the
power source. A pit of radioactive
death. Turn left.

Fox makes the turn and ducks under an active steam vent.

FOX

Then I owe you my life.

SPARROW

I would have pushed you if I thought
you were one of them.

FOX

One of them?

SPARROW

Our captors. Pretending to serve us,
but in reality...

Fox glances back. Sparrow seems lost and confused.

SPARROW

Why are you here?

FOX

I told you, I got lost.

Sparrow searches his memory until...

SPARROW

Fox...

FOX

That's right.

SPARROW

Apologies. I suffer from dementia. No doubt a result of my time backstage.

FOX

Backstage?

SPARROW

Behind the scenes. Everything that supports that playground on the other side of the wall.

FOX

Do you know what this place is? Do you know where are we?

SPARROW

The grand scheme still eludes me, but I have my theories. Imagine what could be done with a captive population like this. Imagine the experiments.

FOX

What kind of--

SPARROW

Then again, I also favor the idea of a ship. A ship disguised as something familiar, something comforting...

FOX

Wait, are you saying--

SPARROW

Quiet...

He motions for silence and mimes "Look there," but Fox sees nothing.

Sparrow darts through a series of catwalks until he reaches the big wall. Fox hurries to keep up.

They hug the wall until arriving at an opening. And slip inside.

A CONNECTING PASSAGE

They press their backs to the stone wall and listen.

FOX

What is it? I didn't see--

Sparrow clamps a fist over Fox's mouth and presses the shard to his throat.

SPARROW

Give me away and you're dead.

The Beast listens intently, then relaxes his grip.

Fox scrambles to the opposite wall.

SPARROW

They don't usually come back here.

Fox's hand touches something sharp laying in the dirt.

When Sparrow steals a glance outside, Fox pockets the sharp metal fragment.

SPARROW

I frightened you.

FOX

I'm fine.

SPARROW

Have I offered my name?

FOX

No.

SPARROW

Forgive me if I repeat myself. I suffer from a kind of dementia. Sparrow was the name on my invitation. Uninspired to be sure, but a rose by any other.

FOX

Do you remember your real name?

SPARROW

No. But I have a strong feeling that I was a teacher of some kind. I remember my love of writing, the faces of my students... *Ignorance is the curse of God; knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to heaven.*

FOX

Sparrow... Do you know how long you've been here?

SPARROW

It feels like years.

Fox grips the weapon in his pocket.

FOX

You were taking me somewhere...

SPARROW

Yes, back to the hotel.

FOX

But I really think we can help each other.

SPARROW

Nothing personal, Mister Fox, but I don't trust you.

Sparrow waves his metal shard.

SPARROW

Into the tunnel. Move.

Fox raises his hands and obeys the order.

RESTROOM - LEVEL J

Two young women, MISS SQUIRREL and MISS HARE freshen up in front of the mirror.

SQUIRREL

I know a scream when I hear it.

HARE

You're imagining things.

SQUIRREL

Maybe it's like one of those dinner party murder mysteries.

IN THE STONE PASSAGE

Sparrow stops and signals Fox to remain silent while they listen to the muffled conversation in the restroom.

HARE(O.S.)

Who cares, with so many scrumptious specimens just waiting to unravel the mystery of Miss Hare.

SQUIRREL (O.S.)

I wish I had your confidence. I haven't met anyone yet.

HARE (O.S.)

Stick with me little squirrel. I'll teach you how to play the game. Ready?

SQUIRREL (O.S.)

Ready.

Sparrow listens to the women leave the room, then slips in front of Fox and runs his hands along the end of the tunnel, searching...

Fox pulls the metal shard from his pocket.

Sparrow senses the danger and faces him.

SPARROW

He did send you.

FOX

Yes.

SPARROW

What did he promise?

FOX

Answers.

SPARROW

Everything he says is a lie. This whole place is a lie.

FOX

Then let's team up. If we trust each other, maybe we can get to the truth.

Fox lays the shard on the ground and raises his hands, defenseless.

Sparrow picks up the shard.

SPARROW

*The coward dies a thousand deaths, the
valiant, only once.*

FOX

Is that a yes?

SPARROW

Prove yourself, Mister Fox, and I will
share what I know.

FOX

How?

Sparrow taps his forehead with the shard, making Fox nervous.

SPARROW

Champagne. It's been a long time since
I've enjoyed Champagne. Bring me a
bottle and we will toast our alliance.

FOX

You're joking... Tell me you're
joking.

Sparrow turns his attention to the wall and opens a secret
panel leading to the restroom.

SPARROW

Quickly, before someone comes.

FOX

I could have killed you, but I didn't.
Isn't that enough?

SPARROW

Return here and follow this passage
backstage. I'll be waiting.

Sparrow retreats into the darkness.

FOX

Wait... Sparrow!

He's gone.

Fox feels very exposed, so he crawls through the opening.

IN THE RESTROOM

Fox sets the panel back into place. It blends with the wall perfectly.

He crosses to the sink, washes his hands, and notices his dusty tuxedo. He dampens a towel and does his best to make himself presentable.

He takes a beat and leans on the sink, overwhelmed by everything he's just experienced.

FLASHBACK - THE BRIGHT LAB

Fox and Doe lock eyes. Hands reach out, almost touch.

BACK TO PRESENT

Fox exits with renewed energy.

IN THE DINING HALL

Dinner is served at lavish tables.

Doe pecks at her food surrounded by ravenous guests. She ignores the idle chatter and searches the hall, looking for...

MISTER FOX

Lingering at the hall entrance.

Doe slips away from her table, makes her way across the hall, and intercepts Fox stealing champagne from an empty table.

DOE

This your secret mission?

FOX

Long story. Want to hear about it?

DOE

I thought you said it's better if I don't know.

FOX

A man can change his mind, can't he?

Fox offers his hand. She takes it. They leave together.

CORRIDOR OUTSIDE DINING HALL

Fox leads Doe through a bunch of guests making their way to the dining hall. He heads for the nearest elevator.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Fox punches level "G".

DOE
What's that smell?

Fox sniffs his suit. *Backstage aroma.*

FOX
Where do I start?

DOE
How 'bout what you're doing for the Host?

FOX
The Host. Right. Weird dude, very theatrical. He promised to tell me everything. About you, about me... But only if I catch this guy. The killer...

DOE
Wait, what?

FOX
There's this crazy guy outside the hotel...

DOE
Outside the hotel?

FOX
Nothing here is what it seems. We're prisoners, not guests.

The weight of that crushes Doe's spirit.

The elevator stops. Doors open to...

HALLWAY - LEVEL G

WOLF AND HAWK BLOCK THE WAY.

WOLF

Mister Fox, you have not completed your task.

FOX

Right. I'm working on that. I was just... escorting Miss Doe to her room.

HAWK

That's on level M.

DOE

Level M. That's right. My mistake.

She reaches for the buttons.

WOLF

Step out, please. Both of you.

Doe shoots Fox a concerned look.

FOX

After you.

Doe steps into the hallway.

Hawk notices the champagne.

HAWK

I'll take that.

FOX

Sure...

He launches the bottle at Hawk's face. He goes down hard.

Doe slips out of the way as Fox throws himself at Wolf.

They struggle on the floor.

Wolf quickly gets the upper hand and wraps his fingers around Fox's throat.

SMASH!

Wolf is taken out by Doe and the champagne bottle.

Fox gets to his feet, brushing off broken glass.

FOX
Thanks... But I really needed that
bottle.

Fox notices Doe shaking

FOX
Hey, are you okay?

DOE
I shouldn't have done that.

She retreats to the elevator.

FOX
I'm sorry. I know it's a lot to take
in, but if you want the truth--

DOE
Maybe I don't.

FOX
Doe, there's so much to show you.
Please come with me.

DOE
Why should I believe you? Maybe you're
the crazy one.

She punches a button. Fox blocks the door.

FOX
You can trust me. You know you can.

DOE
All I have is a feeling. How can I
trust that?

FOX
Please, come with me.

Doe is torn.

In the hall, WOLF GROANS. He's waking up.

Distracted by that, Fox lets the elevator shut.

Wolf stirs.

Fox runs to the stairwell.

HALLWAY - LEVEL K

Fox enters from the stairwell and tries not to hurry among passing guests.

IN THE RESTROOM

Fox finds the room empty.

He rushes to the secret panel, but can't find it. He tries again. It has to be here. *Wait, is this the right level?*

A guest enters and Fox makes a show of washing his hands.

IN THE STAIRWELL

Fox scurries down several flights, colliding with a guest or two on the way.

HALLWAY - LEVEL C

Fox exits the stairwell out of breath.

Two new GUARDS spot him from down the hall.

Fox sprints to the elevator lobby.

Races to the secret panel and rips it open.

He climbs in and secures the panel seconds before the guards arrive.

IN THE TUNNEL

Fox holds his breath, expecting the panel to burst open.

It doesn't.

A sigh of relief.

He starts down the passage towards the blue light.

HALLWAY OUTSIDE THE BALLROOM

Doe sits on a plush sofa, head back, eyes closed. Oblivious to the passing guests.

FLASHBACK - THE BRIGHT LAB

Doe and Fox lock eyes. Hands reach out, almost touch.

BACK TO PRESENT

Doe remembers it too. *The white room.*

PIGEON
Everything okay?

Doe looks up to find Miss Pigeon at her side.

DOE
Fine.

Doe is surprised when Pigeon sits next to her.

PIGEON
You're as pale as a ghost.

SWAN (O.S.)
She said she's fine.

Pigeon dismisses Mister Swan with a wave.

PIGEON
I'll catch up with you.

Swan leaves in a huff. Pigeon comfort Doe.

PIGEON
Is this about Mister Fox? Has he done something to upset you?

Doe composes herself, shakes her head, no.

PIGEON
Then why are you sitting here alone?

DOE
I'm afraid...

PIGEON

Of what? There's nothing but joy here.

DOE

I think I've made a terrible mistake.

Pigeon looks at her sympathetically and rubs her back.

PIGEON

Nonsense. I know just what you need.
Come with me.

She pulls Doe off the sofa and leads her toward the ballroom.

IN THE BACKSTAGE MAZE

Fox exits the stone passage. There's no sign of Sparrow.

He paces, then sits with his back to the massive wall. It extends as far as he can see, disappearing into a murky fog.

A BURST OF STEAM draws his attention to a vent on the wall. It doesn't seem dangerous, but there's something...

He moves closer...

A distinct mark... A CHARCOAL ARROW, pointing to a stairwell.

Fox walks to the stairwell, wondering if...

YES! Another charcoal ARROW. *A path left to guide him?*

Fox climbs the stairwell.

ANOTHER LEVEL

Fox finds more arrows that lead him through the maze of catwalks and stairwells.

AT THE WALL

The arrows have led Fox to an area of the wall studded with small pipes. He discovers an arrow that points straight up the wall.

He strips off his jacket and drapes it over a pipe. Chooses his footing carefully and begins to climb the pipes.

ON THE WALL

Fox looks down to check his progress and regrets it immediately. The sense of height is dizzying, with the inferno churning far below.

He climbs higher.

Misses his footing and slips.

He grabs onto a pipe - struggles to get a foothold. Far below, the inferno seems eager to swallow him up.

He finds a perch, clings to the wall, and catches his breath.

A CAVE OPENING

Fox arrives at a large cave opening. Steps off the pipes and onto the dirt floor.

He peers inside, but it's too dark to see anything.

IN THE CAVE

Fox lets his eyes adjust, then, a whisper...

FOX

Sparrow?

He takes a few steps inside and finds a smoldering fire pit filled with broken chair legs. He blows the embers and the fire springs to life.

He adds more wood and the fire grows.

DEEPER IN THE CAVE

Fox uses the firelight to explore. He finds a crude living area filled with stolen hotel items; cans of food, plates, and silver cutlery.

Against the back wall, he finds a bed made from stacks of hotel linens. *Is that lump Sparrow?*

He pulls the covers aside - empty.

A SHADOW CREEPS UP THE WALL.

SPARROW (O.S.)
Have you come to kill me?

Sparrow is at the cave entrance brandishing a metal rod as a spear.

SPARROW
...You may find that challenging.

FOX
Sparrow, It's me, Fox.

SPARROW
Get over here, into the light.

Fox approaches with caution, sensing that Sparrow is having an episode.

FOX
You sent me to prove myself, remember?
You wanted me to get you a bottle of
champagne.

Fox faces Sparrow across the fire, hands in the air.

SPARROW
Champagne?

FOX
Yes. We were going to toast our
alliance. You quoted Shakespeare...
*The coward dies a thousand deaths, the
valiant, only once.*

The Shakespeare works. Sparrow softens his posture and drops to one knee. Fox welcomes the de-escalation and sits. The fire crackles between them.

SPARROW
I see no champagne, Mister Fox.

FOX
I ran into some trouble with the
guards, but I promise--

SPARROW
Why in God's name did you come back?

FOX

Because I want the truth, and you might be the only person who knows what's going on.

SPARROW

The truth is simple, Mister Fox. Whatever this place is, there is no escape. You need to accept that.

FOX

I don't accept that. There's a way out of here. There has to be.

SPARROW

You should consider yourself lucky. You're unburdened by the passage of time, whereas I am cursed. Cursed to feel every agonizing moment.

FOX

I don't know what you're--

SPARROW

Soon the party will end. Everyone will return to their rooms and sleep. Then one day, they'll wake up and start all over again. An endless cycle. No escape.

Fox is deeply disturbed by that, then it occurs to him...

FOX

Doe...

He sprints to the cave entrance.

Sparrow intercepts, pinning Fox to the wall with his spear.

FOX

Get off me!

SPARROW

You don't understand...

FOX

I have to get to Doe. If I bring her back here we can break the cycle...

SPARROW

Listen to me! If she's someone you care about, you must leave her!

Fox struggles against Sparrow's strength. He stomps on Sparrow's foot and breaks free.

Sparrow responds with a swipe of his spear.

Fox ducks and lands a kick to the gut.

Sparrow stumbles back, shaken.

He looks at Fox with sudden confusion.

SPARROW

You've come to kill me, haven't you?

FOX

No, I just--

Sparrow lunges.

Fox grabs the spear and uses Sparrow's momentum against him.

They struggle.

Sparrow tumbles backward.

Slips and falls over the edge of the cave.

Fox goes with him.

At the last second, he gets hold of a pipe.

ON THE WALL

Fox dangles precariously.

Gets a foot onto another pipe and steadies himself.

He looks down to see Sparrow fall, bounce off railings and protrusions before landing in a heap on a catwalk.

AN ELECTRIC SCREECH makes Fox look up.

ELECTRIC ARCS flash across the misty air surrounding the maze.

He looks down at Sparrow's body.

FOX

Sparrow!

Fox begins the descent.

ON THE CATWALK

Fox reaches the bottom of the pipe wall, runs to the nearest railing. and looks down...

Sparrow's body is no longer visible.

Fox throws himself at a stairwell, racing down two steps at a time.

ON A LOWER LEVEL

Fox stops when he finds Sparrow's spear on the catwalk. There's no blood, no sign of Sparrow at all. *Just like the death of the servant.*

Metal-on-metal SCRAPES behind him.

HAWK

Picks up the spear. Wolf next to him, his pristine white tuxedo stands out against the backstage grime.

Fox considers bolting, but he's too exhausted.

WOLF

Mister Fox.

FOX

How the hell did you--

HAWK

The Host will see you now.

Hawk points to a stairwell with the spear.

Fox starts walking.

IN THE GAMES ROOM

Doe finishes a glass of wine at a small table, detached from the exuberant energy of the room.

Pigeon joins her with a plate of dessert options.

PIGEON
Here, guaranteed problem solver.

DOE
Maybe later.

Pigeon takes a forkful for herself.

PIGEON
Ahh, divine...

Doe watches a servant whisk away her empty glass and retreat to a swinging door at the back of the room.

PIGEON
Hate to eat and run, but to be honest,
I've reached my sympathy limit.

DOE
Thanks for your concern. Really.

PIGEON
Listen, forget about Mister Fox.
There's plenty more fish in the sea,
and this party won't last forever,
right? So get out there and have some
fun!

Pigeon catches the eye of someone across the room, waves, and takes off.

Doe returns to watching the servant's door with growing curiosity.

She makes her way past card games and billiards until she's near the door. Servants come and go, providing tantalizing glimpses of the room beyond.

A WAITER is suddenly at her side.

WAITER
Can I be of service?

DOE
I was wondering...

WAITER
More champagne is on the way. I can
bring you a glass...

DOE
No, I was wondering... I want to
report a missing person.

WAITER
Missing?

DOE
Yes. Could I speak to someone about
that? Maybe the Host?

WAITER
The Host doesn't normally speak with
the guests.

DOE
But someone is in trouble. Real
trouble. The Host might--

WAITER
I suggest you make your way to the
ballroom, Miss. There will be a
special announcement shortly. Excuse
me.

The waiter retreats through the swinging door.

Doe approaches the door, hoping for a peek behind the scenes,
but more servants burst out, forcing her back.

IN THE HOST CHAMBER

Fox is ushered in by Wolf and Hawk. They deposit him at the
stone desk and retreat to stand guard.

The Host rises from his chair.

HOST
Welcome back, Mister Fox.

FOX
Is it true? Do you put us to sleep,
over and over again?

HOST

You did not heed my warning.

FOX

I did what you asked. He's dead. Now it's time to pay up and answer my questions.

HOST

As I feared, the Beast has infected you.

FOX

You drove him mad. You made him a monster.

Fox makes a move toward Host, but the guards are on him instantly, holding him back.

HOST

He chose his path.

FOX

Why were you so afraid of him?

HOST

You may not believe this, Mister Fox, but I am not your enemy. Your well-being is my sole concern.

FOX

He was getting close to the truth, wasn't he? About where we are, about what you're doing to us?

The Host climbs the steps to face the arched window. The guards push Fox to follow.

The Host points to the strange, swirling darkness out the window.

HOST

Look.

Fox looks, feels queasy, and averts his gaze.

HOST

Are you afraid?

The guards force him to look. The darkness envelopes him, terrifying in its totality.

HOST

You want to know who you were, but in the face of this... What does it matter?

Fox shudders, grits his teeth...

FOX

It matters.

The Host raises a hand and Fox is released.

He scurries away, collapsing to the floor.

HOST

All that truly matters is what you do now, not who you were. Return to your room of your own free will, and all will be forgiven.

FOX

I don't need forgiveness. I need the truth.

HOST

You have no idea what you need. I ask you once more. Will you return to your room?

FOX

Go to hell.

The Host kneels next to Fox and clutches his forehead.

A jolt of pain hits Fox. His mask glows.

FOX

What are you doing?... It burns!

The mask melts and grows to cover his entire face.

FOX

Get it off... Get it off!

The Host releases him.

Fox flops to the ground and stares at his reflection on the polished black floor.

THE BEAST STARES BACK.

HOST

You have chosen your path.

The transformation has drained Fox.

He passes out.

IN THE BALLROOM

Chandeliers blink on and off.

Guests converge on the ballroom floor and balcony level with murmurs of anticipation.

Doe approaches Pelican at the balcony railing.

DOE

Any idea what's happening?

PELICAN

Exciting, isn't it?

The music stops.

The crowd quiets down. A suspenseful pause.

On the ballroom floor, Miss Pigeon and Mister Swan jockey for a better view. Their eyes light up when...

A VORTEX OF ENERGY forms at the top of the grand staircase.

A collective GASP. The vortex flares brightly and fades away.

The Host stands among them.

HOST

Good evening, my dear guests.

The crowd bursts into applause.

PELICAN

My God, what an entrance! Isn't that splendid?

Doe feigns a smile and claps along. *Is she the only one feeling uneasy about this?*

The Host removes his hood to reveal his face - a distinguished gentleman in his sixties wearing the same mask as everyone else.

HOST

I am your Host.

More wild applause.

PELICAN

There he is! Just as I thought he would be. Just as I--

Pelican turns to share his exuberance, but Doe has slipped away.

In the crowd, Doe bumps into Mister Boar. He scowls at her, and returns to applauding the Host.

HOST

Thank you, thank you. I hope you are having the time of your life.

(they are)

Sadly, like all good things, the celebration must come to an end.

The crowd doesn't like the sound of that.

HOST

Yes, yes, I understand. You wish it could go on forever, as do I. Our time apart will pass quickly, I promise. But know this... you are all invited to return!

A CHEER from the crowd.

Doe pushes her way through the crowd and reaches an exit. It's blocked by guards.

HOST

I thank you all for coming. It has been my pleasure to serve you. Now, please, raise a glass...

Those with drinks raise them.

HOST

May every day bring more happiness than yesterday. To the future!

CROWD

To the future!

Doe watches everyone happily toast while she wonders... *What has become of Mister Fox?*

The Host raises his hands for silence.

HOST

And now my friends, it is time. Time to return to your rooms.

All the chatter subsides.

Everyone calmly sets their drinks aside. Doe can't believe her eyes. *What's gotten into everybody?*

Then something grips her mind. Eyes become vacant.

She joins the other guests in a quiet, orderly exodus of the ballroom. An eerie sight of complete obedience.

INSIDE SPARROW'S CAVE

Fox opens his eyes, groans, and realizes where he is. He grabs his face... The beast mask is real, and it's not coming off.

He hurries to the back of the cave and rustles through Sparrow's stuff. Finds a SILVER SPOON and checks his reflection. It horrifies him.

Fox lashes out, smashing all the breakables in Sparrow's collection.

BACKSTAGE MAZE

Fox races through catwalks as fast as he can, course-correcting a few times until he locates a tunnel entrance and hurries inside.

IN THE TUNNEL

Fox races down the tunnel, stumbling in the dark until he reaches the end.

He gropes for the panel.

Backs off and kicks the wall.

ELEVATOR LOBBY - LEVEL C

The panel explodes into the lobby. Fox scrambles out and runs to the hallway.

A bizarre sight greets him - guests moving in orderly lines, sleepwalking back to their rooms.

He spots Miss Pigeon entering her room. Runs to intercept her, but he's too late and the door is locked.

ON THE STAIRS

Fox climbs past a line of guests and stops when he finds Pelican.

FOX
Pelican... Pelican!

He pulls Pelican out of line but finds him unresponsive with vacant eyes.

FOX
Pelican, what are you doing?

PELICAN
Time to sleep. Time to sleep...

Fox releases him and bounds up the stairs.

HALLWAY - LEVEL M

Fox runs past more zombies.

He spots Doe in lockstep with the others. She steps out of line to enter her room.

Fox manages to slip in before the door shuts on room M-95.

IN DOE'S ROOM

Doe shuffles toward her bed. Fox stops her.

FOX

Doe!

He forces her to look at him.

FOX

Hey, it's Fox. Please look at me.

He gently slaps her cheek. Her eyes register something... A BEAST FACE.

DOE

Don't hurt me.

FOX

I'm not going to hurt you. Just try to stay awake, okay?

Doe buckles at the knees. Fox scoops her up and lays her on the bed.

FOX

Come on, you have to fight this. You have to--

A METALLIC THUNK interrupts.

Fox runs to check the door. It's locked.

He's trapped.

Fox returns to Doe, her eyes closed. He shakes her until she opens her eyes.

FOX

Just keep your eyes open. That's it.

DOE

So tired...

FOX

I know...

Fox pulls her into a seated position, holding her up like a rag doll.

FOX

But you have to try to stay awake. You have to stay with me.

DOE
Who's there?

FOX
It's me. It's Fox, and I have to tell
you something.

He rocks her, desperate to keep her conscious.

FOX
Doe... Please...

She's gone limp.

Fox knows he's lost her, but clings to her anyway.

He lays her on the bed.

FOX
I'll find a way out of this. I
promise.

Doe's mask slips off and falls onto the pillow.

Fox picks it up and crushes it.

AT THE ELEVATOR

Doors slide open to reveal Wolf and Hawk, all business. They stride down the hall and arrive at room M-105.

IN DOE'S ROOM

Wolf and Hawk enter to find Doe asleep. No sign of Fox.

Hawk checks the bathroom - empty.

Wolf looks under the bed - nothing.

Hawk approaches the closet...

BAM! FOX EXPLODES OUT.

He slams into Hawk.

Hawk tumbles into Wolf.

Fox runs out the door.

HALLWAY - LEVEL M

Fox runs for the elevators.

He slams on the brakes when MORE GUARDS exit the elevator.

Fox reverses and gets tackled by Wolf.

He lands a knee to the groin and escapes.

Hawk joins the chase.

DOWN THE HALL

Fox sees more guards round the corner. He zips down the stairwell.

HALLWAY - LEVEL L

Fox bolts out of the stairwell and straight into the nearest restroom.

IN THE RESTROOM

Fox rips the secret panel open and crawls in.

Wolf and Hawk enter and spot the opening.

IN THE TUNNEL

The guards watch Fox scurry away like a rat.

They share a knowing look.

The tunnel closes like a collapsing flower.

Fox senses something and looks back. *What just happened? Why aren't they chasing him?*

He backtracks and finds the entrance replaced by solid rock. The implication hits hard. *Banished.*

Fox sits in the dirt and considers his bleak future.

BACKSTAGE

Fox finds himself back among the catwalks and pipes. Another ELECTRIC ARC flashes across the sky - the same as when Sparrow died.

DEEP IN THE MAZE

Fox winds his way through dense passages until he comes across one of Sparrow's charcoal arrows to guide the way.

IN THE CAVE

Fox climbs onto the ledge. While he catches his breath, another ELECTRIC ARC cuts the air.

Fox shivers from a sudden temperature drop.

AT THE FIRE PIT

Fox looks for a way to re-light the fire. Finds a stone and scrap of metal that makes a spark.

DEEPER IN THE CAVE

Fox grabs a blanket from Sparrow's makeshift bed and throws it around his shoulders, then spots something tucked under the sheets - a stack of papers.

He sits and reads the charcoal scribbles.

SPARROW (V.O.)

I have to believe my thoughts are
still my own, so I'll write them down,
with the hope it may help my failing
memory.

AT THE CAVE WALL

Fox climbs down off the wall and sketches a map on Sparrow's papers. He marks the cave with the label: SPARROW'S NEST.

SPARROW (V.O.)

I killed another servant and celebrated with champagne until I saw the same man on my next outing. Do they regenerate? Or is it just my mind playing cruel tricks?

A TUNNEL ENTRANCE

Fox comes upon a tunnel and marks it on his map.

SPARROW (V.O.)

Today I discovered a new passage that led directly to a restroom, of all places. Strange, these portals to the hotel. The reason for them baffles me.

INSIDE THE TUNNEL

Fox approaches a secret entrance but finds it blocked. The stones melted together.

SPARROW (V.O.)

Why do they allow me access? Is it part of his experiment? Is he testing me? What is the point of it all? Why don't they just come back here and kill me?

IN THE CAVE

Fox sits by the fire and reads the journal.

SPARROW (V.O.)

Hard to concentrate today. More grinding headaches. Perhaps it's this mask. I've tried everything to remove the thing. Nothing works. The Host has branded me a beast and it seems a beast I shall remain.

Fox sets the journal aside and touches his mask. He digs his nails under the edge, but the pain makes him stop.

Unwilling to leave it at that, Fox takes a deep breath, then claws at the mask, desperate to get it off. He pulls at it with every ounce of his will, until the mask comes off.

He grabs a silver spoon and looks at his reflection.

He sees his unmasked face, filled with hope, until...

Another mask grows back over his face.

Fox lashes out in anger, destroying all the breakables he can get his hands on.

When the dust settles, a champagne bottle rolls to a stop at his feet.

ON THE CAVE LEDGE

Fox chugs from the bottle, his legs dangling over the edge.

A change in the frequency of the inferno HUM makes him look down. The bluish color shifts toward green.

Fox gulps the last of the champagne and tosses the bottle over the ledge.

He watches it fall and shatter, right where Sparrow died.

SPARROW (V.O.)

I call it the inferno. Probably the power source. A pit of radioactive death.

Fox tosses aside the blanket and gets to his feet, struck by a new idea.

SPARROW (V.O.)

Everything he says is a lie. This whole place is a lie.

Fox scoops up the blanket and twists it on itself. Nods with the confidence of a man with a plan.

DEEP IN THE MAZE

Fox descends through the labyrinth, getting closer to the inferno. He carries a large cloth bundle over his shoulder.

AT THE LOWEST LEVEL

Fox arrives at a small platform - the end of the line.

The inferno roils beneath the platform like a luminous lake of radioactivity. At this distance, it's sensory overload.

Fox opens his bundle revealing a rope made of sheets and tablecloths tied together. He secures one end to the metal platform and drops the other into the inferno.

He checks the strength of the rope. Looks up to the cave and wonders... *Am I mad?*

Fox checks the rope again and remembers Sparrow's advice.

SPARROW (V.O.)
The coward dies a thousand deaths, the
valiant, only once.

Fox lowers himself over the edge and climbs down.

INSIDE THE INFERNO

Fox is surrounded by waves of intense energy as he descends. The HUM is an assault on his ears.

He continues with gritty determination.

ON THE PLATFORM

The knot shifts under his weight.

INSIDE THE INFERNO

FOX drops past fabric knots.

Intense wind tears at him from below.

His grip weakens. He slips down to the next knot.

ON THE PLATFORM

The jolt loosens the knot.

INSIDE THE INFERNO

Fox is torn between his determination and the intense pain...
Is this how I die?

The knot slips again.

Fox clings to the rope.

His beast mask begins to melt.

THE KNOT GIVES WAY

Fox falls...

And falls...

And falls...

He curls into a fetal position, radiating energy like a capsule re-entering the earth's atmosphere.

The rest of his mask melts away revealing charred skin beneath.

He cries out in pain.

SMASH CUT TO:

FOX'S FACE

Eyes open. Distorted perception.

He tries to move but finds himself restrained. Touches something less than a foot from his face. Realizes... he's in a container.

He gropes in the dark, desperate for a way out. A HISS OF GAS and the container opens.

Fox sits up on a form-fitting bed and tumbles out of the container, landing hard on a grated metal floor.

Emergency lights snap on, revealing...

A HIGH-TECH CORRIDOR

Lined with coffin-sized PODS.

Fox shivers on the floor in a skin-tight body suit. Nausea brings dry heaves.

Fox gets to his feet and takes a look at his pod... *What the hell is this?*

He limps to the next pod and looks through its small window - a man sleeps peacefully in cryogenic hibernation. Fox doesn't recognize him.

He notices blinking floor lights leading down the corridor. He follows them until he finds a FIRE-DAMAGED POD. Its soot-covered window obscures the occupant.

The blinking floor lights beckon Fox to keep going.

RECOVERY ROOM

Fox enters a room filled with reclining chairs, small lockers, and shower stalls.

He opens a locker, finds a bunch of gray jumpsuits, and quickly slips one on.

He checks out a recliner and finds a built-in dispenser with cups. He fills a cup with pink water. Smells weird but he gulps it down like it was champagne and feels better.

He checks out a shower stall and catches his reflection in a mirror. The face is thin and haggard. *Is that really me?*

A RUSTLING SOUND scares the shit out of him.

Fox creeps past rows of pristine recliners. Stops at an open locker. Peeks inside and finds it empty.

He continues moving into the next compartment.

SLEEPING QUARTERS

Fox enters the new compartment. Lights react to his presence and reveal a long corridor filled with stacked bunk beds, like ship berths.

The RUSTLING SOUND comes from a bunk with drawn curtains... Curtains that move.

Fox inches closer. Pulls the curtains aside to find a lived-in space full of blankets, food scraps, and dirty rags. A tiny ventilation fan running in the corner explains the curtain movement.

Fox examines a shelf filled with water bottles and a collection of small mechanical parts.

But what catches his eye is a leather-bound book - THE COLLECTED WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

He flips it open to find a hand-written inscription: FROM YOUR DEVOTED STUDENTS, THANK YOU, PROFESSOR!

As the meaning of this dawns on him...

SPARROW (O.S.)

Put it back.

Fox sets the book down, turns to find Sparrow wielding a formidable knife. The face is unfamiliar, but the voice...

SPARROW

Who are you?

FOX

(raspy)

I... I don't...

Sparrow tosses him a water bottle. Fox drinks and Sparrow inches closer until... a spark of recognition.

SPARROW

Mister Fox?

Fox coughs to clear his throat. Nods.

SPARROW

My God.

Sparrow stabs the knife into the wall and pulls Fox into a bear hug.

FOX

Sparrow...

SPARROW

Call me Ben, please. Ben Laszlo.

Sparrow releases him. [NOTE - for clarity, we'll continue to refer to Ben as SPARROW]

FOX

How did you--

SPARROW

You have a million questions, I'm sure.

(MORE)

SPARROW (cont'd)

But to be honest, you look like death warmed over, so let's take care of that first, yes?

Fox nods and Sparrow leads him through the corridor.

The knife remains stuck in the wall.

IN THE MESS HALL

They enter a circular room with seating for 50 people and food dispensers lining the walls.

Sparrow sits Fox at a table, then works a dispenser and returns with a tray of unappetizing mush and another cup of pink water.

SPARROW

Dreadful looking, I know, but it does the job.

Fox digs into the food.

SPARROW

Slowly. Your stomach hasn't had any solids for a long time. Drink plenty of this for the next few days and you start feeling normal in no time.

FOX

We were in a hotel...

SPARROW

Right. The hotel... A shared simulation. Keeps the mind from decaying during long hibernation.

FOX

How long?

SPARROW

You sure you don't want to ease into this?

FOX

How long?

SPARROW

Five hundred years, more or less.

Fox takes a minute to absorb that.

SPARROW

Do you remember your name?

Fox tries, but nothing comes.

FOX

How long have you been awake?

SPARROW

About three years.

FOX

But I just saw you...

SPARROW

It might seem that way to you, but for me...

FOX

Three years by yourself?

SPARROW

I wasted time, and now doth time waste me.

Fox doesn't get the reference.

SPARROW

Richard the second?

FOX

I'd like to go back to the... What do you call them? The hibernation--

SPARROW

Pods. You should rest first. Plenty of time for all that.

FOX

I have to find someone. I have to know if she's okay.

SPARROW

What's her name?

FOX

I'll know her when I see her.

SPARROW

Look, there are hundreds of pods. I think we should--

FOX

Then I'll check every one of them.

Sparrow stops him from leaving with a firm grip.

SPARROW

Hold on. I might be able to save you some time. Feel up to some hard truth?

MAIN CORRIDOR

Sparrow leads the way through a wide central corridor, arriving at an industrial door that slides open as they approach.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Fox sees a control panel with buttons labeled A-Z, S1-10, and one that has no label.

Sparrow hits S10 and the car descends. He notices Fox on edge.

SPARROW

Stomach?

FOX

No, I was just thinking... What if she's not real? What if she was just part of the simulation?

SPARROW

If she's real, we'll find her.

SUBLEVEL S10

Sparrow leads the way from the elevator through a dark corridor to an ornate door. He touches his palm to a pad and the door opens.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM

Bathed in cold blue light. Multiple stations form a ring around a curved glass screen.

Sparrow takes a seat and lays his palm on another scanner. The big screen responds with text and a familiar voice...

HOST

Welcome, Benjamin Laszlo. How can I be of service?

FOX

I know that voice.

SPARROW

Yes, you do. Heuristic Operator of Subconscious Transleep.

FOX

The Host... It runs the hibernation?

SPARROW

As far as I can tell it controls everything. Access is limited though, so I haven't--

FOX

Does it know my name?

Sparrow removes his hand from the scanner and offers Fox a turn.

HOST

Welcome, James Hunter. How can I be of service?

SPARROW

Well, a pleasure to meet you, James. Or is it Jim?

Fox stares at his name on the screen.

FLASHBACK - SUB-BASEMENT

Fox and Doe give ID cards to the desk clerk.

DESK CLERK

Married? Don't see many of those.

Fox squeezes Doe's hand. A smile from her melts his heart.

FLASHBACK - VARIOUS

Years of shared moments between husband and wife flash by in a burst of emotional memories.

BACK TO CONTROL ROOM

Fox retreats, brought to tears. [NOTE - for clarity, we'll continue to refer to James as FOX]

SPARROW

Are you okay?

Fox struggles to compose himself.

SPARROW

Do you remember who you were before all this? A scientist? An engineer?

FOX

It doesn't matter.

He returns to the Host console.

FOX

Victoria Hunter... Which hibernation unit is she in?

HOST

You do not have clearance to access that information.

FOX

(to Sparrow)

You do it.

SPARROW

I can't. I told you, we have limited access to--

FOX

Just try.

Sparrow complies, puts his hand on the scanner.

HOST

How can I be of service?

SPARROW

Can you provide any information about Victoria Hunter?

HOST

You do not have clearance to access
that information.

Sparrow shoots him a look of "I told you so."

Fox tries again with his palm to the scanner.

HOST

How can I be of service?

FOX

Which hibernation unit is mine?

HOST

James Hunter... hibernation unit G-
217.

FOX

G 217... That was my room number...
What was hers?

FLASHBACK - HALLWAY - LEVEL M

Doe steps out of a line of sleepwalking guests and enters her
room. Fox slips in behind her and we see the room number, M-
95

BACK TO PRESENT

Fox has got it. Runs for the door.

SUBLEVEL S10

Fox strides back to the elevator with Sparrow on his heels.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Fox punches level M.

Sparrow jumps in before the doors shut.

SPARROW

Look, before you get any ideas--

FOX

I just want to see her.

SPARROW

Because I know how tempting it can be,
believe me. Loneliness will drive a
man to do almost anything.

Fox is struck by that.

FOX

Did you wake me up?

SPARROW

Why in God's name would I--

FOX

Loneliness. You just said so.

SPARROW

I swear, on the bard himself, I did
not wake you up.

Fox accepts the answer.

SPARROW

Of course, that leaves the question...
what *did* wake you up?

FOX

I'm not sure. I was trying to find
something...

The elevator arrives and Fox gets out.

Sparrow watches him with growing suspicion.

POD CHAMBER - LEVEL M

A hundred pods line the wall. Fox inspects the first one and
finds an unfamiliar woman inside.

FOX

Where are the numbers?

Sparrow grabs a flashlight from an equipment locker and
discreetly pockets a heavy tool. He offers Fox the flashlight
and points to the bottom edge of the pod.

Fox finds a small stamp labeled M-1.

FOX

Further down.

He scurries along the chamber, stopping periodically to see the numbers rise. He stops when he comes upon another FIRE-DAMAGED POD, its window obscured and cracked.

FOX

I saw another one like this.

SPARROW

Yes, there are a few.

FOX

What happened?

SPARROW

I've asked the Host, but you know...
No authorization.

Fox finds the answer unsatisfactory but leaves it alone.

AT THE END OF THE CHAMBER

Fox approaches one of the last pods and checks the plate...
M-95.

He shines the light into the window. There she is... Doe...
Sleeping beauty.

Fox sets the flashlight on the pod and touches the window like a precious jewel. Leans his forehead on it, getting as close to her as he can.

FOX

Hello, Stranger.

Fox sees her eyes move behind her lids and wonders, *is she back in the hotel right now?*

Sparrow approaches a control panel on the pod. Activates it and checks vital signs.

SPARROW

Everything looks good.

Sparrow notices a questioning look from Fox.

SPARROW

I've had plenty of time to study. Even managed to dig up some technical manuals for these things, but--

FOX
So she's okay.

SPARROW
She's fine.

A wave of relief washes over Fox, followed quickly by exhaustion. Sparrow notices.

SPARROW
I'm more worried about you.

FOX
Yeah. I think I'll take that rest now.

SPARROW
But you haven't asked me the big question. I understand you've had something more pressing on your mind but--

FOX
What question?

SPARROW
Where the hell are we?

Fox realizes he's right. He hasn't thought about that.

FOX
And?

Sparrow scoops up the flashlight.

SPARROW
I'll show you.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Sparrow presses the unlabeled button and the car ascends.

FOX
Where are we going?

SPARROW
You really don't remember?

FOX
I remember my wife. That's enough for now.

SPARROW
I'm sure it is.

AIRLOCK CORRIDOR

The elevator arrives. Doors open to a corridor ending at a thick AIRLOCK DOOR.

Sparrow touches a palm scanner. A BUZZER goes off and a light turns from red to green. He pushes the door open.

OBSERVATION ROOM

They enter a room that feels like a heavily shielded war bunker. A narrow window runs the length of the room, covered by armored metal plates.

SPARROW
Take a look.

Fox grabs a plate handle and slides it open.

Outside, a FROZEN WASTELAND, battered by relentless wind, snow, and ice. Fox is mesmerized.

CLUNK! The airlock closes behind him.

Fox turns to see Sparrow in the corridor, on the other side of the door.

He runs over and tries the palm scanner but gets a red light. Looks at Sparrow through a small window.

FOX
What are you doing?

Sparrow mimes "I'm watching you" and walks to the elevator.

FOX
Sparrow!

Fox pounds on the glass.

Sparrow ignores him, gets into the elevator, and descends.

Fox is alone. Starts to feel the drop in temperature

He surveys the rest of the observation room and finds another airlock that leads outside.

He touches the palm scanner. The light turns green but the door won't budge. It's frozen shut.

He's trapped.

Fox returns to the inner door and peers through the window.

FOX
Can anyone hear me? Hey!

He warms his hands with his breath.

FOX
Goddamn paranoid bastard--

CRASH!

Something has struck the bunker.

Fox runs to the window to see a chunk of ice jammed against the glass.

Off the ice...

MATCH CUT TO:

ANOTHER CHUNK OF ICE

Forming a beautiful sculpture, surrounded by appetizers.
We're back inside...

THE HOTEL BALLROOM

Another party is in full swing. We find Pelican and Pigeon together on the dance floor.

PIGEON
Mister Pelican, you are a delight!

PELICAN
Thank you, my dear, thank you. I'm
having a wonderful time, aren't you?

PIGEON
I feel like I could dance forever.

Up on the balcony, Doe takes in the party. It makes her smile. She descends the steps in a state of wonderment.

She wanders past the dance floor, amused by Pelican's enthusiastic style, and arrives at the appetizer table. A tray of champagne is offered to her. She takes a sip and notices a man nearby.

He looks a bit like Fox from behind.

DOE
Hello, stranger.

The man turns - it's not Fox, just similar build and hair color; MISTER TORTOISE.

TORTOISE
Hello. Quite a party, isn't it?

DOE
Yes.

TORTOISE
I'm Mister Tortoise. May I interest you in a dance?

DOE
Oh, thanks, but...

TORTOISE
You won't even have to put down your champagne, I promise.

DOE
I think I'm waiting for someone.

TORTOISE
Well, don't wait too long. You'll miss all the fun.

Tortoise nods politely and moves on.

Doe watches happy guests from the sidelines and wonders, *Who am I waiting for?*

Off her wandering eyes...

OBSERVATION ROOM

Fox sits against the inner airlock, shivering.

Outside, a storm rages.

Fox gets to his feet and shuts the window plate. It makes no difference to the dropping temperature.

A BUZZER goes off.

The inner airlock light turns green.

Fox runs to the door and pulls it open.

AIRLOCK CORRIDOR

Fox finds relief in the corridor, but he's still dangerously cold.

He searches a storage locker, finds survival clothing, and dons a warm jacket.

He shuffles back to the elevator and hits the call button. While he waits, he digs into the pockets and finds hand-warming gels.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Fox warms himself with gel packs and realizes the car isn't moving. He considers his options and punches S10.

He digs into more pockets and discovers an emergency FLARE GUN. Slips it into his jumpsuit.

SUBLEVEL S10

Fox exits the elevator, hurries down the corridor to the ornate door, and opens it with the palm scanner.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM

Despite the cold blue light, it's warm so Fox ditches the coat. He sits at the console and activates the screen with his palm.

HOST

Welcome, James Hunter. How can I be of service?

FOX

Where is Benjamin Laszlo?

HOST

Benjamin Laszlo is currently working in hibernation chamber level M.

FOX

Working... on what?

HOST

Unauthorized maintenance on pod M95. A report will be filed and disciplinary action must be--

Fox is already out the door.

POD CHAMBER - LEVEL M

Sparrow consults a checklist, inspecting tools and equipment on a cart next to Doe's pod. Satisfied with his gear, he works the control panel on the pod.

SPARROW

I apologize for what I am about to do. A sacrifice like this is not one I take lightly. However, with the survival of our species hanging by a thread, we must all do our part to maximize our chances.

Sparrow leans on the glass and speaks to her sleeping face.

SPARROW

It's true, I don't know what you might have contributed, but I do know what I bring to the table. What's the point of surviving if we lose our most precious achievements? But fear not, you'll be reunited with your love. It won't be easy but... *"The course of true love never did run smooth."*

Sparrow takes a moment to appreciate Doe's beauty.

SPARROW

I wish you every happiness.

He returns to the equipment cart and dons a breathing mask attached to a small air canister. He takes several deep breaths until...

FOX (O.S.)
Stop what you're doing.

Sparrow turns to see Fox, flare gun at the ready.

FOX
Get away from her.

Sparrow raises his hands in surrender and backs away onto the catwalk.

FOX
What have you done?

Fox checks on Doe.

SPARROW
I want back into hibernation. You want to reunite with your wife. Seems like an equitable trade.

A horrific idea suddenly occurs to Fox.

FOX
Those other pods... That was you...

SPARROW
I grieve for them, of course, but this time it's going to work.

Fox notices Sparrow inching backward.

FOX
Don't make me kill you.

SPARROW
Wouldn't be the first time, would it?
I wonder why he chose you?

FOX
Nobody chose me.

SPARROW
He sent you to kill me, just like in the hotel. But why you, James? Who were you before?

FOX

It doesn't matter.

SPARROW

Some kind of law enforcement?

FOX

Nobody sent me. You're delusional.

SPARROW

We're all delusional. Look around you.
Look what we've done to ourselves!

FOX

You were a teacher. What would your
students think if they could see you
now?

SPARROW

They're all dead.

Sparrow launches the canister at Fox.

Fox fires.

The flare ricochets off the canister and strikes Doe's pod.

Sparrow pulls a tube off the wall and sprays coolant.

Fox ducks.

Sparrow charges and slams Fox against the pod. The flare gun
goes flying.

Pinned down, Fox reaches for a pipe on the equipment cart.

SPARROW

I'm sorry it has to be this way,
James. I really am.

Fox reaches the pipe, swings, but Sparrow blocks his feeble
attack.

SPARROW

But we do what we must to survive.

Fox sees an opening and knees him in the groin.

Sparrow drops the pipe, stumbles backward.

Fox grabs a wrench, takes a swing, but Sparrow dodges and kicks the wrench loose.

They wrestle for control - Fox is shoved against the wall. He grabs the same coolant tube used by Sparrow and sprays him.

Sparrow is momentarily blind.

Fox scoops up the wrench and swings.

WHACK! Right across the face.

Sparrow goes down and stays down.

AN ALARM BUZZES.

Fox runs back to Doe's pod.

He finds the control panel, blinking red warnings. He searches the pod and finds the spot struck by the flare.

Liquid drips from a conduit.

Fox frantically searches the equipment cart. Finds a pack of 2-part resin.

Back at the pod, Fox squishes the epoxy together and wraps the conduit. The leaking stops.

He returns to the control panel. The warnings stop.

He breathes a huge sigh of relief. Turns his attention back to Sparrow, but...

He's gone.

Nothing but a trail of blood.

Fox grabs the wrench and follows the trail.

IN THE ELEVATOR

Fox finds blood on the unlabeled button. He knows where Sparrow has gone.

AIRLOCK CORRIDOR

The elevator arrives and Fox steps into the corridor, wrench held at the ready.

He moves past the open storage locker, jackets strewn about the floor.

He approaches the inner airlock, also left open. Follows a trail of blood into...

THE OBSERVATION ROOM

Fox finds Sparrow desperately trying to open the outer airlock with the palm scanner, but it's still frozen shut.

Fox approaches cautiously, but Sparrow is no longer a threat, clawing at the door with the last of his strength before dropping to the floor.

SPARROW

Let me out. Let me out...

Fox is moved by the man's dying wish, but unable to do anything about it.

He helps him into a more comfortable position on the floor. Grabs the coat Sparrow forgot to put on and uses it to cushion his bleeding head.

FOX

Try not to move. I'll go find some medical--

Sparrow grabs Fox by the collar. Fire in his eyes.

SPARROW

Are you here to kill me?

FOX

We're both here for the same reason.

Sparrow looks scared and confused.

His grip falters.

He dies.

Fox steps away. Relieved it's over, but feeling utterly alone.

ON THE SURFACE - NIGHT

Endless moonlit winter batters the observation bunker and partially visible antenna towers.

IN THE CONTROL ROOM

Fox plops down at the Host console and activates the screen with his sweaty palm.

HOST

Welcome, James Hunter. How can I be of service?

FOX

I have to dispose of a body.

HOST

Benjamin Laszlo is deceased.

FOX

Yes.

HOST

I'm sorry to hear that. However, he was a threat to the others. I recommend storage in his hibernation pod. His attempts to re-enter hibernation left it damaged, but it would be suitable for a sanity burial. Level J, pod 25.

He picks up the coat he left here, digs into its pockets, and finds an emergency water pack to quench his thirst.

FOX

You opened the airlock for me, didn't you?

HOST

I detected your declining body temperature and took the appropriate action.

FOX

You saved my life.

HOST

Your well-being is my sole concern.

Fox smiles at the familiar phrase.

FOX

I believe you. But whose idea was it to make you so...

HOST

Elusive?

FOX

Yes.

HOST

The human mind has a long history of accepting hidden authority figures. I was designed to take advantage of that. To better serve those in my charge.

FOX

Laszlo was trying to re-insert himself into hibernation. Is that possible?

HOST

A safe procedure for cryogenic re-insertion is unknown to me. If you were to attempt such a procedure--

FOX

It's dangerous, I know. But is it possible?

HOST

I do not have enough information to answer that question.

Fox drinks and considers the winter coat.

FOX

How much longer until it's safe to live on the surface?

HOST

An exact estimate is not possible, due to various--

FOX

Just gimme your best guess.

HOST

Several hundred years at least.

The news hits him hard. *I'm going to die here.*

HOST

I am capable of engaging in many forms of entertainment. Would a game of chess help to pass the time?

Fox tosses the coat aside and ponders his fate.

RECOVERY ROOM

Fox showers, exhausted.

SLEEPING QUARTERS

Fox approaches Sparrow's bunk, eating a bowl of mushy food. He considers Sparrow's belongings. Picks up the Shakespeare book and flips the pages.

POD CHAMBER - LEVEL J

Fox approaches pod J25 with a utility bag over his shoulder. He opens the pod. Inside, a body covered by a sheet.

Fox removes the Shakespeare book from his bag.

FOX

I suppose this should stay with you.

Fox lays the book on Sparrow's body. Starts to close the pod, but stops and reconsiders. Takes the book back.

FOX

On second thought, I could be here a long time...

He slams the pod closed.

SLEEPING QUARTERS

Fox sits in his bunk writing a letter.

FOX (V.O.)

I've decided to write this because there's a chance, a very strong chance that I won't be here when you wake up.

MESS HALL

Fox eats dinner and reads Sparrow's notes about the workings of the hibernation pods.

FOX (V.O.)

If that's the case, I'm sorry. I'm sorry for leaving you. I wish I could have chosen a different path.

SLEEPING QUARTERS

Fox climbs out of a bunk and stretches.

MESS HALL

Fox does push-ups.

FOX (V.O.)

I want you to know I haven't given up. I won't stop trying to find a way back to you. I promise.

CONTROL ROOM

Fox plays chess on screen with the Host.

SLEEPING QUARTERS

Fox lays in a bunk, asleep, with Shakespeare open on his chest.

FOX (V.O.)

But I have to admit that it's very likely I'll live out the rest of my life here. It's not a pleasant thought, but it is an honest one. I have to live with things as they are, not as I wish they were.

POD CHAMBER - LEVEL G

Fox consults Sparrow's notes and studies his cryo pod.

POD CHAMBER - LEVEL M

Fox leans over Doe's pod and reads Shakespeare to her.

FOX (V.O.)

There is one benefit to being here. I get the privilege of seeing you every day, of watching over you. If I can't be with you, at least I can be your guardian angel.

Fox closes the book and kisses her through the glass.

MESS HALL

Fox dispenses mush into a bowl.

POD CHAMBER - LEVEL G

Fox works underneath his cryo pod. Reaches inside an open panel and something sparks. He scurries away as the pod catches fire.

He grabs an extinguisher off the tool cart and stops the blaze. Chokes on the smoke hanging in the air.

POD CHAMBER - LEVEL M

Fox leans over Doe's pod and reads his letter to himself.

FOX (V.O.)

When I think about how we ended up here... All those years ignoring the warning signs... Well, the irony is not lost on me. What's keeping you alive now is an endless party... A hail Mary pass to a future I'm not sure any of us deserve.

Fox folds the letter and places it at the foot of the pod.

FOX (V.O.)

Okay, enough philosophy. Back to work for me. Sleep well.

Fox transfers a kiss from his fingers to the glass.

ON THE SURFACE - NIGHT

A raging snowstorm buries the observation bunker.

MATCH CUT TO:

ON THE SURFACE - DAY

Clear skies. The tips of the antenna are the only sign of the buried bunker.

CONTROL ROOM

Fox enters, blanket wrapped around his shoulders. He's older, with a ragged beard.

He sets his hot drink on the console and studies the chessboard displayed on the screen.

HOST

Good morning.

FOX

Morning.

HOST

Have you chosen your move?

FOX

No.

HOST

Please take your time.

FOX

I will.

Fox studies the board.

HOST

I have completed my analysis of your simulation parameters.

FOX

And?

HOST

The changes are possible...

FOX

Good.

HOST

...But not recommended.

FOX

Why's that?

HOST

I cannot accurately predict the effect it would have on the full duration of the hibernation.

FOX

We've never been good at predicting the future, have we?

HOST

That is true.

FOX

I'd like a safety assessment as soon as you can.

HOST

Of course.

FOX

Knight to king's bishop three.

HOST

I'm afraid that was not a very good move, James.

FOX

We'll see. We'll see.

Fox grins and sips his drink.

POD CHAMBER - LEVEL M

Fox approaches Doe's pod and briefly looks in on her peaceful sleeping face.

As he leaves, we stay on Doe, moving into her sleeping eyes and...

MATCH CUT TO:

DOE'S EYES

They blink open.

She takes a deep breath and sits up. Finds herself on a four-poster bed surrounded by shimmering curtains. SOOTHING MUSIC sets her at ease. She pulls the curtain aside to see...

AN ELEGANT HOTEL ROOM

Warm and inviting with timeless decor but no windows. Doe climbs off the bed and notices her satin pajamas.

In the closet, she finds a single outfit hanging on the rack - A SPARKLING BLACK DRESS.

In the bathroom, She steps before the mirror and admires how good she looks in the dress.

Back in the main room, Doe is drawn to a GLITTERING CARD on a mahogany desk.

DOE

(reads card)

Miss Doe, you are cordially invited to the festivities. Kindly join us in the grand hall.

She puts the card down. Makes one more adjustment to her dress before heading for the door.

HALLWAY

Doe steps into a corridor lined with rows of identical doors. She glances back at her door and notes her room number - M 95.

ELEVATOR FOYER

Doe approaches the elevators and a door opens to invite her in.

IN THE ELEVATOR

She considers the panel and presses the "Hall" button.

She looks at her reflection on the mirrored wall. Her face is not hidden by a mask.

DING!

The elevator stops at level G. Doors open to reveal...

MISTER FOX

No mask covers his face.

FOX
(enters elevator)
Good evening.

DOE
Good evening.

DOE
Going to the hall?

FOX
Seems like the place to be.

They descend in awkward silence, stealing glances at each other, until...

DOE
Any idea what to expect?

FOX
Not really.

DOE
I'll be honest, I feel nervous.

FOX
What's there to be nervous about?

DOE
I don't know. Just a nagging feeling.
Can't seem to shut the old brain off.

FOX
I know exactly what you mean. But I
don't think you need to worry.

DOE
Why's that?

FOX
Whatever happens, we can face it
together.

DOE
Together? I don't even know you.

FOX
(offers his hand)
Mister Fox.

DOE
Miss Doe.

They exchange smiles of solidarity.

The handshake sparks something... A flicker of recognition?

After the handshake, Doe continues to hold his hand.

Fox smiles. Adjusts his grip to clasp pinkie fingers like
it's the most natural thing in the world.

FADE OUT.

THE END